Communicating Ourselves into Communion:
The Theology of the Body and Meaning within Interpersonal Communication

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

John Paul II's *Theology of the Body,* outlines an anthropological understanding of the human person as composite body and soul, emphasizing that the body serves as a meaningful symbol by which one communicates oneself in the pursuit of communion. Approaching communication theories, specifically symbolic interactionism, with this symbolic understanding of the human person has great implications. This thesis brings into concert the lens of human anthropology articulated in the *Theology of the Body* and the concepts and principles central to symbolic interactionism to more fully illuminate how the act of interaction, both through the language of words and of the body, is a place capable of communicating and discovering the fullness of the meaning of the human person. Through this pursuit, many insights into how interpersonal communication can achieve a communion of persons through a communion of meaning are extrapolated.

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Process Analysis Statement

My first two years at Ball State University consisted of a constant search for a body of knowledge to call my own. After taking courses in speech pathology, entrepreneurship, social work, psychology, English, and philosophy, I finally found the common thread of my fascination: how we understand and communicate who we are within relationships. I realized that the effectiveness of all domains depended primarily on an integration between theory and practice, and the integrity of communication situated within relationships. During this time, I also became enthralled in theological writings, specifically in John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, which speaks of the human person as an integration of body and soul, created for relationship in communion. I came to understand communion as the ultimate goal of all communication, and discovered that interpersonal communication studies gave me unique access to theories and research that illuminated the concrete realities and processes by which relational communion can be pursued. This thesis is a culmination of the personal mission in which I entered communication studies with, the desire to understand communication processes according to their repercussions in the spiritual reality and their advancement towards communion.

My thesis brings together the theological work which has had the greatest impact on my personal and intellectual development throughout my college career, John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, with the communication theory of symbolic interactionism. I progressed on this thesis by steeping myself in John Paul II's text, and in the texts of the communication theorists Mead, Blumer, and Burke. I allowed the connections between these texts to inform my direction. Throughout this process I was consistently amazed by the degree of similarity between the way that the *Theology of the Body* and communication theory approach questions of self and

meaning, as well as the capacity of each to enrich the tenants of the other. I learned about my own capacity and passion for marrying disciplines and ideas, and acquired many insights into my own capacity to communicate. My final thesis represents not only a culmination of these thought processes, but an ongoing personal pursuit to understand the integration of physical and spiritual realities in my relationships through communication.

"This isn't a mere wrestling with images carried in our thoughts; we fight with the likeness of all things that inwardly constitute man. But when we act can our deeds surrender to the ultimate truths we presume to ponder?" (Pope John Paul II, 1994, p. 53)

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INTRODUCTION

The process of human communication is one that contains hidden dimensions and spiritual truths. While human interaction appears as a simple process, both verbal and nonverbal interactions echo much further past their enactment, affecting the transcendent realities of meaning, relational dialectics, and self-understanding from which we navigate our lives. This transcendent quality of communication merits contemplation. How can we approach a deeper understanding of the spiritual dimensions of the communication process? How would this inform our pursuit of engaging in communication that best embodies the spiritual truths and our intended meanings?

In his work *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II outlines an anthropological understanding of the human person as composite body and soul, emphasizing the body's capacity to serve as a meaningful sign by making manifest spiritual mysteries in the visible reality of the world. John Paul II accomplishes this by analyzing the essential narrative of the Biblical story of redemption. Unpacking the bold density of the *Theology of the Body* has animated much of theological study, being described by George Weigel (1999) as a "theological time bomb set to go off with dramatic consequences, sometime in the third millennium of the Church" (p. 336). Given the symbolic nature of the human person that centers John Paul II's argument, the implications of his work intersects with the field of communication, as the communication discipline studies the processes in which symbols are employed to establish meaning.

John Paul II (1979) says that the process of communication expresses the person in his or her "ontological and existential concreteness, which is something more than the individual"

(12:4).[1] According to John Paul II's text, both the dimension of the visible body and "the dimension of human interiority is necessary" to explain "the particular fullness of interpersonal communication" (12:4). It is through the communication process in which John Paul II believes that persons can achieve the goal of interaction, what he refers to as "communio personarum," or the communion of persons. The communion of persons is an intimate sharing or exchanging of persons characterized by the experience of unity or oneness. John Paul II holds that this communion exists within every dimension in which man, created as a body and soul, occupies, and is therefore achieved on a physical and mental level as well as a spiritual level. Though John Paul II speaks weightily of interpersonal communication, he does not focus his thesis on the implications his understanding of the human person's anthropology and redemption has on how communication should be approached practically in order to foster communion. Consequently, there is an opportunity to use communication theory as a means of enriching our understanding of John Paul II's contentions in ways that help guide an individual's communication behavior. Through doing this, John Paul II's unique treatment of the human person as body and soul will also help illuminate the deeper realities in which communication theories touch upon.

John Paul II's treatment of the body as a symbol of a person, and of human interaction and communion as the only place in which the meaning of the body and human person can be fully understood, particularly invites the application of symbolic interactionism, which frames communication as a sharing of significant symbols in interaction. Both John Paul II and symbolic interactionism argue that it is through interactions that individuals are capable of expressing meaning, or truth, to varying degrees of fullness based on individual interpretation

[1]Please note: I am citing the *Theology of the Body* by section and paragraph number because page numbers vary depending on the format of the published text.

and the intentional integration of meaningful communicative symbols. The purpose of this thesis is to bring into concert the lens of human anthropology articulated in John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* and the concepts and principles central to symbolic interactionism. The premises of the original experiences of man, as outlined by John Paul II, will be coupled with the premises of symbolic interactionism, as outlined by Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969), to more fully illuminate how the act of interaction, both through the language of words and of the body, becomes a place capable of communicating and discovering the meaning of one's full self. Through doing so, the goal is to examine the metaphysical role in which verbal and nonverbal communication can represent, or make incarnate, spiritual or invisible realities about ourselves. Through this understanding of what constitutes communication, many practical insights about how interpersonal communication can achieve a communion of persons through a communion of meaning can be extrapolated.

Theology of the Body

The *Theology of the Body* is comprised of a series of 129 addresses given by John Paul II to his Wednesday papal audiences from 1979 to 1984. John Paul II's addresses have been compiled into a catechesis that illuminates the fullness of God's plan for human life from humanity's very origin to eternal destiny through exploring the mystery of the incarnate person and the biblical analogy of spousal love. These addresses have been collected under the title, *Man and Woman He Created Them*. John Paul II's focus on spousal love, as a revelation of the meaning of the human body and person, serves as a springboard into self-understanding. John Paul II's argument is that "man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons" (9:3). He makes the point that since God, as a

Trinity, constitutes perfect self-gift (since the three persons of the Trinity pour perfectly into one another in love), humanity, who is made in the image of God, can only understand who they are and how they are to live when in communion with others. In order to move forward, it is helpful to understand first the Biblical foundations through which John Paul II extrapolates his points and, since his thesis is situated in the entirety of the Christian story of salvation, an understanding of this narrative is crucial. By looking at the development of this narrative, we can see the original experiences of Adam and Eve as a mine of information regarding man's essential character.

John Paul II's Biblical Approach

John Paul II roots his arguments in the analysis of the book of Genesis as the first biblical sketch of anthropology, and as an account "especially of theological character" (16:3). Through allegory, the book of Genesis describes creation not necessarily in a chronological sense, but in an existential sense as to reveal the nature of man. The experience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has the capacity to prefigure and transform our understanding of the human experience. As Christian anthropology seeks to understand the nature of man, both body and soul, in relation to God, it is important to understand that John Paul II enters into these questions of meaning with a recourse to absolute Truth. Truth refers to an absolute meaning defined by God who is Truth Himself. While John Paul II believes in absolute meaning, he does not deny that meaning can be distorted and relativized by humans. In fact, he holds that our perfect communication with God, self, and other, as prefigured in the Garden of Eden, has been broken by the Fall of man, who must now actively seek the fullness and perfection of which he was once capable.

The Biblical Narrative

The overarching narrative of the story of salvation, of mankind's Fall and call to redemption, is key to understanding the lens by which John Paul II approaches human questions. This narrative holds that Adam and Eve once lived in communion with both God and one another, but broke that perfect union through original sin. The coming of Jesus Christ, entering the typological role of being the New Adam, restored the relationship between God and man, and gave Himself in the Eucharist as a direct pathway to perfect communion with Truth. The coming of Christ, considered the Divine Logos, revealed God the Father uniquely. The revelation of absolute meaning is embodied in the human person of Christ as He perfectly reflects the image of God. Jesus's Incarnation as the "Word made flesh" made radically clear that matter has a meaning that even God Himself would don. Since the entire logic of Christianity comes alive in the body of Christ, it is clear why John Paul II considers the body to be an important, inextricable, and too often overlooked place of theological reflection.

Along with revealing the divine, Jesus embodies perfect humanity, which is understood through his perfect self-gift. Jesus completely emptied Himself on the cross for the sake of the world and for the love of the Father. It is in this part of the story that man now finds himself situated, redeemed with the capacity for eternal life through the power of mercy, but still subject to the weaknesses of his fallen flesh and spirit. The story left to come is the redemption of the body, most finally at the eschaton, the end of times. The bodily Resurrection and Ascension of Christ prefigures that there will be fleshy holiness, a redemption of the ways in which our bodies are understood and used perfectly with the Spirit. Current life is a pursuit of holiness of both the

body and spirit. To understand what this final call for the human person looks like, it is important to look at the original experiences of man.

The Original Experiences

Contemplating Adam and Eve's life before the Fall, or the "original experiences" as referenced in the *Theology of the Body*, gives us insight into the fullness of communication that existed when man was in perfect communion with Truth. Therefore, through examining these original experiences, one gains insight into the type of relationship God created man for and what it means to communicate according to the fullness of Truth. The evolution of man's discovery of himself through the outline of these original experiences reveals truths about the nature of personhood and can inform our self-understanding. The following key ideas related to the evolution of the original experiences are important to understand.

1. Original Solitude- Man was originally alone, making man aware of his personhood and personal subjectivity through the search for meaning and his capacity to engage in meaning.
2. Original Unity- Upon being created man and woman, the fullness of personhood is finally able to be understood, since humanity is created to engage in self-gift.
3. Original Nakedness- The visible and the invisible were so tied that this nakedness refers to the perfect communication of self through spirit and body. Adam and Eve were able to see each other as full subjects, in all of their entirety and spiritual integrity, and not as objects.
4. Original Shame- Upon eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve were filled with shame. The integrity of their original state of nakedness is

now spoiled, as they now look at themselves as an object of the other's gaze and are now conscious of how the other looks at him or her as an object.

These original experiences will ground my analysis demonstrating the ways the *Theology of the Body* aligns with symbolic interactionism. To begin, it is important to understand the central ideas of symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic Interactionism

Pursuing a similar goal as John Paul II's text, the theory of symbolic interactionism approaches the question of what it means to be a human self and examines the essential role of communication in the discovery of what it means to be human. In fact, symbolic interactionism contends that communication, particularly through language, is the most human and humanizing activity in which people can engage in. The origin of symbolic interactionism is largely traced back to the early 20th century work of George Herbert Mead. When teaching social philosophy at the University of Chicago, Mead bridged pragmatic tradition with sociology in a powerful way that compelled his students to publish his teachings and notes in the book *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Mead, 1934) after his death. The perspective's label of "symbolic interactionism" was coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937, whose book *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Blumer, 1969) serves as another foundational work.

Symbolic interactionism holds that a human being must be understood primarily as a social being, as it is precisely through interaction in which meaning originates and develops (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Meaning is tied intimately to the social process, as according to Mead (1934), meaning is objectively made present within the relationship of the phases of a social interaction. The threefold relationship between a given gesture, a responding gesture

adjusted to that of the giver, and the completion of the given gesture (the degree in which the response refers to the first), “constitutes the matrix within which meaning arises, or which develops into the field of meaning” (Mead, 1934, p. 76). Essentially, a response to a gesture is not a response to a gesture as much as it is a response to the meaning of that gesture by interpretation, which is what gives the gesture meaning. Meaning is therefore derived from a mutual adjustment between the communicators through responses or actions which is made possible through the process of communication. Mead (1934) says that this process “takes the form of a conversation of gestures in the earlier evolutionary stages of that process, and of language in its later stages” (p. 77). Mead maintains that the genesis of verbal language allows for an advanced entrance into the negotiation of meaning and the universe of discourse. Mead states that language allows for symbolization, whereby objects are constituted which would not exist except through social relationships. Not only does language symbolize a situation or object which is already in existence, “it makes possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object, for it is a part of the mechanism whereby that situation or object is created” (Mead, 1934, p. 78). Therefore, not only the development of, but the very existence of, the mind and self is dependent upon the process of social interaction, which is made rich within the symbolic process of language.

Blumer (1969) outlines three core premises of symbolic interactionism that concern the role of meaning, language, and thought leading into conclusions about the creation of self and socialization into a larger community. Blumer’s (1969) premises in this work are as follows:

1. "Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things" (p. 2).

2. "The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society" (p. 2).
3. "The meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters" (p. 2).

By bringing these premises of symbolic interactionism into concert with the aspects of the "original experiences" of man outlined by John Paul II, we can more richly approach how the process of communication sheds light on how man understands himself and how both symbolic verbal language and the symbolic language of the body play a role in this process.

ANALYSIS

According to Mead (1934), ideal communication consists of the use of "significant symbols" with consciousness of their meaning (p. 75). Mead states that it is only in this consciousness of symbolic meaning that responses can be called out of others in accordance to the intentionality of our gestures. Therefore, since the *Theology of the Body* introduces the body as a particular symbol of the person, a deeper consciousness of the meaning of this symbol must be pursued. John Paul II states that "a deepened consciousness of the meaning of the body is indispensable" (23:5). He states that this accurate comprehension of the body's meaning is necessary for people to find "full and personal dimension in shared life, in behavior, in feelings" (23:5). In saying this, the pope declares that to engage in shared meaning, or full communication, on any front, requires a deeper understanding of the meaning of our corporeality. An orientation to the invisible meaning of our visible bodies is crucial for using our bodies to effectively navigate and communicate in the field of meaning. John Paul II states that to discover our own meaning, man must "return in some way to the threshold of his theological history… place

himself at the boundary between original innocence-happiness and the inheritance of the first fall" (23:5). The threshold from which John Paul II is asking us to observe is one that contemplates the original experiences of Adam and Eve in their perfect communion with God and each other, specifically original solitude, unity, and nakedness without shame. These experiences are in contrast to the immediate injury to this communion following the Fall, which brought about the original experience of shame.

It is by contemplating the original experiences of man that we can enter into the task of the "redemption of the body," which refers to our return to physical and spiritual integration in the light of absolute Truth. This task is at once both humanizing and sanctifying, therefore begging our pursuit, however, according to the Christian narrative, this redemption of the body will reach its ultimate fulfillment only through God at the end of time. According to John Paul II, this work "must consist in retrieving this dignity in which the true meaning of the human body, it's meaning as personal and 'of communion,' is fulfilled at the same time" (23:5). In the following analysis, through returning to the threshold of man's theological history through the original experiences of solitude, unity, nakedness, and shame, we will explore the meaning of the body as a symbol, capable of fully communicating personhood. This analysis will shed light on the nature of individuals' communicative possibilities by means of the body, language, and thought.

Original Solitude: Man's Search for Meaning Reveals Unique Subjectivity

"Humans act toward people or things on the basis of the meanings they assign."

In seeking to understand the meaning of ourselves through this analysis, we are immediately participating in what John Paul II asserts to be the very endeavor expressed in the

search of the first man, Adam. “Right from the first moment of his existence, *created man* finds himself *before God as if in search of his own entity*. It could be said he is in search of the definition of himself” (5:5). This search is embodied in the state of Adam’s original solitude. Genesis immediately characterizes man as being “alone” (*Gen* 2:18), and this simple fact leads John Paul II to make quite poignant anthropological conclusions regarding the Biblical text’s immediate portrayal of personhood as being characterized by subjectivity, that which constitutes the quality of being a subject (6:1). A subject is a being with a unique consciousness and with agency to act upon and relate to entities outside of itself, or objects. It is in his state of solitude in which Adam comes to know of his identity as a subject. John Paul II speaks of the situation of original solitude as “the whole process of the stabilization of human identity in relation to living beings (animalia) as a whole, since it is the process of man's ‘differentiation’ from this environment” (8:3). Adam discovers his subjectivity through two dimensions, in his consciousness of being alone, and in his corporeality by which this consciousness is embodied.

Adam gains consciousness of his distinctive subjectivity in both his inability to identify one like himself, and in his ability to identify that his knowledge of this fact sets him apart from the other creatures. In Adam’s original solitude, his state of being alone in a world of animals, he cannot fully identify himself. John Paul II conceptualizes Adam’s meaning making process at this time as “negative meaning” (5:5). Adam knows what he is not, but knows not yet who he is. However, in order to know what he is not, he engages in a meaning-making process that is distinct to his nature, an ability given by God to man and not the other animals in Eden. This distinctiveness thereby reveals a part of who Adam is. As Adam searches for meaning, his distinctive abilities, specifically the ability to engage in symbolic naming, brings Adam closer to understanding his personhood.

Symbolic Naming and Participation in the Field of Meaning

Adam discovers what it means to be a person through the means and nature, as well as content, of his search. Adam's very first task in Genesis is to name the animals, assigning verbal symbols to their bodily realities. This process of symbolic naming is distinctive to personhood, and is what Mead considers to be the unique basis of human society. In order to form identity, man first identifies. Adam navigates through the pursuit of differentiating himself from the animals by creating symbols to interact with the world. He uses language to correspond with the animal's visible realities. Hence, while Adam cannot fully grasp the meaning of himself in the midst of his solitude, not having one like himself with which to identify, he still creates meaning of the world through language. This language use allows Adam to know, and this knowing further distinguishes Adam from the other creatures. According to John Paul II, Adam's consciousness is revealed to him in his possession of his power to know the visible world. Through and in his ability to search for meaning, to name, and to know, Adam gains knowledge that knowing is distinct to his personhood, and this is self-knowledge. It is this self-knowledge, or consciousness of self, that uniquely characterizes personhood and constitutes Adam's distinct subjectivity (5:6). Adam learns an element of what constitutes himself, his mind.

According to Mead, mind, or consciousness, essentially consists of the use of significant symbols. "Only in terms of gestures as significant symbols is the existence of mind or intelligence possible; for only in terms of gestures which are significant symbols can thinking — which is simply an internalized or implicit conversation of the individual with himself by means of such gestures — take place" (p. 47). Adam's subjectivity is distinct because he can participate in this field of meaning, an invisible dimension in which other creatures cannot through thought.

This capacity not only reveals to Adam something he *can do*, but something he *is* because this activity is done in the place of his body.

"Man is subject not only by his own self-consciousness and self-determination, but based on his own body. The structure of this body is such that it permits him to be the author of genuine human activity. In this activity, the body expresses the person" (7:1). Adam finds his subjectivity in that he can uniquely link the visible and invisible through understanding meaning precisely because he is uniquely body and soul. Understanding the importance of this anthropological characteristic is key to understanding the fullness of communication. By effect of this linkage, meaning exists not only in the sphere of the invisible, but the visible. We can understand why Adam reveals himself to himself in his activity of symbolic naming in the visible world because "the body expresses the person" (7:1). This is the fullness of his subjectivity. Not only does he make symbols, he is a symbol of the deeper reality of himself that is expressed by his very body.

An Absolute Language: A Language of Existing

Hand in hand with symbolic interactionism's basic tenant that the self is a function of language, Adam's use of language is crucial for him to approach consciousness of himself amidst his solitude. However, Mead attests that one must be in a community of persons for consciousness of self to set in, as the self is created in interaction. Mead dismisses that knowledge of self can be acquired through introspection. Then how does Adam have consciousness at all if he does not have other persons in which to create meaning with?

Despite Adam's original solitude from human interaction, John Paul II does not suggest that Adam gains the self-knowledge that allowed him to grasp his subjectivity through

introspection. Rather, the *Theology of the Body* implies that Adam's knowing was not isolated within himself. Speaking of Adam's knowledge of himself, John Paul II says, "With this knowledge, which makes him go outside of his own being, man at the same time reveals himself to himself in all the distinctiveness of his being" (5:6). John Paul II speaks not of introspection, but of Adam going outside of himself. He may not have another with which to identify, but through his embodiment, and differentiation and all that process entails, he "reveals himself to himself."

Adam's coming into self-consciousness was in harmony with the outward event of interacting with the world, and in the field of meaning opened to him by language. That the first man has a language he can use to name creation at all is mysterious considering language so uniquely characterizes personhood. Language is created in the unique social interaction that characterizes personhood, yet Adam did not experience social interaction. This idea marks a departure between the original experience of Adam and the current experience of man that must be acknowledged in order to clearly provide further synthesis. The original experience of Adam is unique from today's experiences in that he was in perfect communion with the Absolute. The invisible reality of the eternal Creator constitutes perfect meaning. Meaning, though invisible in substance, was a reality perfectly symbolized in matter (6:2; 7:3). Since the book of Genesis is symbolic in nature, there is no way to say that Adam's "naming" of the animals was through the verbal language processes we understand today. What is important to understand is that Adam's "naming" does indicate that he was participating in meaning making through the use of symbolic language that was transcendent of his visible reality. Since corporeality corresponded perfectly with meaning, it is possible that this "language of the body" was inherent to Adam's experience. This makes sense since Adam knew only of the experience of existing, and yet this experience

corresponded perfectly with the development of meaning and consciousness unlocked by the key of language unique to the original state. Reality is communicated to Adam in his activity of existing.

Adam's Consciousness Limited from Being Alone

Blumer (1969) states "humans act toward people or things on the basis of the meanings they assign towards those things" (p. 34), and this idea is exemplified in Adam's experience. In the originality of his experience, armed with language perhaps of a mysterious form, Adam acts towards things according to their absolute meaning. Adam thereby assigns meaning to things on a basis of how he interacts with and observes them in matter. He creates meaning through the activity of symbolic gesturing, uncovering some self-knowledge. However, he is incomplete because he has a social language without a social other.

Even in Adam's mode of existence, aligned with the Absolute, Adam's true language lacks a full understanding because it is not shared, and because only this sharing of the human experience can mark the fullness of the truth of who he is. Adam cannot fully reveal himself to himself because a key component of his nature, self-gift, is not self-contained. As John Paul II states, in Adam's solitude, without another in which to identify, Adam's self-consciousness "is not yet a complete definition" (5:5). This incompletion further characterizes the human experience.

Redeeming the Meaning of Solitude

John Paul II says that Adam's original solitude has two meanings, "one derived from man's very nature, that is, from his humanity, and the other derived from the male-female

relationship" (5:5). While Adam's experience of original solitude is existentially different from our own, these meanings still hold true for us as individual persons. Firstly, we have meaning in our individual humanity. As subjects, our personhood is embodied and expressed in our activity, and hence we should act in accordance to the dignity of ourselves as unique subjects in order to act with integrity. As Adam learns of himself through his distinctiveness from other creatures, we too can understand who we are more deeply through what makes us distinct and unique from others. John Paul II says that "finding of oneself in one's own gift becomes a source of a new gift of self", namely in an exchange of that gift (17:5). In order to give oneself, and for that gift to truly be free, we must maintain a depth of "self-possession", or self-mastery, so our actions contain the freedom of agency distinctive to persons (17:6). This self-possession and consciousness deepens the meaning of giving ourselves in relationship.

Secondly, both Adam's solitude and our own points to our need to be realized fully in relationship. Adam needs to be in a relationship with another in order to comprehend fully the reality for which he was created. The unfolding of this reality is what will be central to the analysis of the following original experiences.

Original Unity: Shared Self, Shared Substance, Shared Meaning

"Meaning arises out of social interaction that people have with each other."

The words of God in Genesis, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (*Gen* 2:18), serve as a prelude to the narrative of the creation of a partner for Adam. John Paul II holds that it is in this narrative in which the sense of original solitude becomes part of the meaning of original unity. John Paul II suggests that the language used in Genesis to describe man's slumber does not connote a passing into the subconsciousness of sleep, but possibly a specific return to non-

being, or simply the situation of original solitude as a whole. “In this way,” he says, “the circle of the solitude of the man-person is broken, because the first man ‘awakens from his sleep’ as ‘male and female’” (8:3).

John Paul II notes that while the ancient text uses the term “man” to refer to Adam, it does not refer to Adam as “male” in terms of sexual distinction until after the creation of Eve. In this order, it becomes clear that where it was not good for man to be alone, man’s creation as “male and female” specifically marks a particular completion of goodness that marks the fullness of the human identity. Where the original solitude of Adam was manifested by his “non-identification,” he is now able to fully discover his humanity with the help of the other, marking the fullness of consciousness (12:3). Burke’s (1969) premises of symbolic interactionism demonstrate that it is only in social interaction with another that meaning can fully arise. While John Paul II agrees that this social interaction builds into human discovery, he holds that it is not as much the interaction from which meaning arises, but the *relationship* in which interaction takes place. It is precisely in relationship, he holds, that the essence of man is realized, because man was created for self-gift. By further unpacking the law of the gift, we can set the foundation to approach the full nature of Adam and Eve’s experience of original unity through the communication concepts of role taking and consubstantiality, as to paint a clearer picture of our own communicative possibility to participate together in unity.

Law of the Gift.

"The gift reveals, so to speak, a particular characteristic of personal existence, or rather, of the essence of the person. When God-Yahweh said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone' (*Gen* 2:18) he affirmed that alone, ‘man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it

only by existing with someone' — and even more deeply and completely — by existing for someone'" (14:2). John Paul II explains that man only finds fulfillment, and finds himself, when he lives in a relationship of mutual self-giving, living not for himself, but for another person. This premise, referred to as "the law of the gift" by many *Theology of the Body* scholars, is written upon every human heart (Weigel, 1999). John Paul II notes that man is made in the "image" of a Triune God, a Trinity of three divine Persons in communion with one another, giving themselves completely to each other in love. Therefore, created in the image of the Trinity, man is made, not to be in isolation, but to "live in an intimate personal communion of self-giving love, mirroring the inner life of the Trinity" (Sri, 2006, p. 1). This is why John Paul II states, "man became the image of God not only through his own humanity but also through the communion of persons" (9:3). Therefore, Adam can only realize his full humanity by both sharing in common humanity with another, and by sharing his unique humanity with another as a gift. As Adam and Eve are given to one another by God, they also give themselves to one another, resulting in communion.

Understanding the Self through the Other

From the very moment of our birth, we gain insight into the meaning of ourselves through the response of others to us. It is consistent feedback that allows us to know ourselves, and eventually, our consciousness develops as to anticipate the feedback of another. According to Mead (1934), human thought is characterized by its unique capacity to take the role of the other. This role taking not only allows us to understand others, it uniquely paints our own concept of self. By way of stepping into the role of others, we can imagine how we look to another person. This mental image, or our looking-glass self, is socially constructed, which is

precisely why one must interact with others for the concept of self to set in. Mead expands upon this self-understanding by explaining the "I" and the "me." To Mead, the "I" refers to the present self, the driving, spontaneous force that makes up who one is. The "me" is the image of the self as seen in the looking glass of the reactions of others by means of role taking, constituted by the attitudes of others. According to Mead, the self consists of the ongoing process of combining the "I" and the "me," which speaks to a unified understanding of self that was expressed in the original communion of Adam and Eve. For the "me" is made up of the perceived attitudes of others, and integration of the "I" and "me" necessitates the perfect sharing of meaning between a self and another that was unique to the original experience.

As Burke (1969) points out, having a body, common experiences, and language helps us identify with each other. However, people also have unique experiences that may result in different interpretations that keep us divided. When Adam and Eve were first created, however, their interior unity was substantiated by their shared interpretation or reality. This interpretation was written into the symbols of their bodies, which perfectly and entirely expressed the fullness of themselves. Perhaps the original role taking of Adam and Eve could be best expressed as "role entering," as Adam comes to fully understand himself not just by means of his relationship with Eve, but precisely in that relationship, as it completes his self. Rather than looking at himself through the eyes of the other, Adam looks *at* the eyes of the other to know himself. Eve is the looking glass in which Adam understands himself. While she is not a mirror of his embodiment, Eve's complementariness perfectly reflects the very purpose of Adam's self as designed to give himself to her in self-gift.

Consubstantiality

Adam identifies with Eve so deeply, that he expresses their union as that of one substance, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (*Gen* 2:23). John Paul II states that in this way "the man manifests for the first time joy and even exaltation, for which he had no reason before, owing to the lack of a being like himself. Joy in the other human being, in the second 'self,' dominates the words spoken by the man on seeing the woman" (8:4). Man's self-understanding, and hence his language, is so fully informed by his counterpart that John Paul II refers to the woman as Adam's "second 'I'" (8:4).

Adam's fulfillment in his identification with Eve illustrates Burke's (1969) concept of consubstantiality, which he held to be the goal of all rhetoric. Burke borrows the term consubstantial, or "shared substance," from the religious concept of the communion table and refers to the unconscious desire of persons to identify themselves with others. The idea of consubstantiality is one that recalls the relationship of the Trinity which contains one God and three persons fully shared and identified with one another. In the experience, persons paradoxically remain unique individuals, and yet see the other as an extension of themselves. Persons are both joined and separate, simultaneously distinct and consubstantial with one another. According to Burke, consubstantiality is achieved through communicating freely in shared meaning. In sharing meaning with another, they are able to act together, taking a "sub-stance" together. Burke states, "in acting together, [people] have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them; *consubstantial"* (p. 21).

Through the experience of the body, and a common language provided by their Creator, Adam and Eve identify deeply with one another. The Trinitarian nature of the language in which Burke uses to explain the purpose of communication cannot be lost in its relevance to the

contentions of *Theology of the Body*. Since man is created in the image of a Triune God, it is only natural for the fullness of their communication to consist of consubstantiality. According to John Paul II, it is in this sharing of life that the differences of Adam and Eve do not point to division, but rather, to their complementariness, and to their unity.

Redeeming Unity through the Gift of Self, Sharing Meaning, and Exaltation

According to Mead, the ideal goal of all social progress is "the constant evolution of human social organization in the direction of greater and greater relational unity" (p. 311). In striving to realize unity both within oneself and within the relationship between the self with another first modeled by Adam and Eve, we can look at our current communication practices. According to Mead (1934), a sense of complete identification of the self with another, or a fusion in the "I" and the "me," occurs uniquely through social activities, particular when one gives to others. Mead states that upon the experience of identification, of fusion,

> The impulse of the "I" in this case is neighborliness, kindliness. One gives bread to the hungry. It is that social tendency which we all have in us that calls out a certain type of response: one wants to give… Giving is stimulated by more giving. He may not have much to give, but he is ready to give himself. (p. 274)

Mead's description of the need of the self to give to others aligns with John Paul II's law of the gift. Not only does the experience of unity incite the impulse of self-gift, but the giving of self pours into the experience of unity. John Paul II states, referring to the complete giving of the spousal relationship, that in complete giving, "The 'I' becomes in some way the 'you,' and the 'you' the 'I' (in the moral sense)" (92:7). In a way, through giving of ourselves we are drawn out of ourselves and towards another, making way for communion.

In this pursuit, social activities that allow as to act or experience together with another person promote the enactment of Burke's understanding of consubstantiality. Shared experiences, and creating shared terms to understand reality increase our communicative accuracy. For our role taking to be more of role entering, we must step into the role of another not to fix our eyes on ourselves, but to understand the other. The movement of empathy very practically achieves both identification, consubstantiality, and role entering. In empathy, we not only feel for another, but with another, entering into their experience. The other is not simply the object of our reaction, but the subject of our reaction, increasing our shared life.

An encounter with another person should inform our emotional manifestations, just as Adam's exhalation and joy in the person of Eve dominated his language upon encountering her (8:4). Mead (1934) states, "It is where the 'I' and the 'me' can in some sense fuse that there arises the peculiar sense of exaltation which belongs to the religious and patriotic attitudes in which the reaction which one calls out in others is the response which one is making himself" (p. 274). Mead refers to exaltation as the emotional response, and John Paul II holds that the properness of this response must be cultivated through reverence. As Adam was aware that Eve was a gift to him, enriching his life and understanding of the meaning of himself, so we must approach others according to the depth of their reality and inherent dignity.

Original Nakedness: The Fullness of Interpersonal Communication

"Meaning arises out of social interaction that people have with each other."

John Paul II particularly highlights the Biblical verse: "the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). According to John Paul II this verse about Adam and Eve "unquestionably describes their state of consciousness, in fact, their mutual experience of

the body" (11:5). The place of the body expresses the authenticity of the first experience of Adam and Eve in the greatest precision possible since the visible body manifests man. The text's indication of a lack of shame denotes less of a lack of shame, and more of a fullness of the experience of nakedness (12:2). This nakedness, or full expression of self as a gift to the other, according to John Paul II, "enables man and woman, right from the beginning, to communicate with each other according to that *communio personarum* willed by the Creator precisely for them" (12:5). As the body manifested the whole, inner richness of themselves as a subject, Adam and Eve were able to communicate themselves and respond to the other according to the "whole truth, the whole self-evidence of the human being, just as God-Yahweh had revealed it to them in the mystery of creation" (15:3).

The Language of the Body Based on Clear Vision

According to Burke (1969), language is a "symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (p. 43). In a unique way, Adam and Eve are able to share perfectly in the meaning of one another because of the symbolic function of their body. In this way, John Paul II says, "the language of the body enters into the integral structure of the sacramental sign whose principal subject is man, male and female" (105:1). In other words, the body is the most perfect symbol of all that is the person. Entering into the language of the body means that we must employ the symbol of our body with a high degree of what Mead (1934) defines as intentionality, or the degree to which a response to a gesture reflects it's intended meaning, confirming the gesture as a "significant symbol" (p. 47).

For full meaning of the symbol of the body to be realized requires a shared interpretation of the experience. In other words, the language of the body must be mutually understood. "To

this fullness of exterior perception, expressed by means of physical nakedness, there corresponds the interior fullness of man's vision in God, that is, according to the measure of the 'image of God'" (12:5). Interiorly, they are participating in the vision of God, absolute Truth. The Biblical text clues us in to the nature of God's vision, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (*Gen* 1:31). The trust that Adam and Eve have in the gaze of the other is what gives them a full willingness to stand before one another in intimacy, revealing not only the language of their bodies, but their interior hearts, with nothing held back. John Paul II calls this state of trust in the vision of the other the "peace of the interior gaze" (13:1). Because there is no shame the couple holds back nothing of themselves, deepening their exchange of gift. They trust that the other person sees them in the fullness of their subject. John Paul II says that through the awareness of the meaning of their bodies "the freedom of the gift expressed and the whole inner richness of the person as subject is shown. This reciprocal interpenetration of the 'I' of the human persons, of the man and the woman, seems to exclude subjectively any 'reduction to an object'" (19:1). In this way, Adam and Eve saw and were seen in the fullness of their subjectivity as distinct persons, cultivating a shared, intersubjective experience of union while remaining individuals that John Paul II referred to as "bi-subjectivity" (91:3).

Redeeming the Language of the Body

In our current lives, it is worthy to consider how we can express an integral language of the body to the best of our ability. According to John Paul II, for language to achieve significance, it must effectively refer to reality. He refers to this integrity of sign as sacramentality, the ability to be a sign that points to a reality. "The sacramental sign is constituted in the order of intention insofar as it is simultaneously constituted in the real order"

(103:2). John Paul II highlights that the Sacrament of Marriage is unique in that the couple themselves administer the union through their marriage vows, their own words, as well as through the language of their bodies. “The sacramental sign of marriage is constituted by the words of the newlyweds inasmuch as the ‘reality’ which they themselves constitute corresponds to those words” (103:2). In this way, the couple is able to “confer a new aspect on their life in the strictly personal (and interpersonal, communion personarum) dimension on the basis of the ‘language of the body’” (103:6). Together, they themselves come to form a sign of a covenant, an unrepeatable communion of persons, that has a future-oriented meaning. Their marriage is a sign of “their own gift” (103:6). While John Paul II is referring to marriage, this concept is well applied to the use of both the language of words and of the body in general.

Unless verbal language contains sacramentality, referring to true realities and intentions, the integrity of its meaning is compromised and does not serve as unitive. Particularly, our language cannot remain without embodiment, without a language of the body. If one was to cheer on somebody at a race, and then, while cheering, intentionally trip them, there is a discrepancy between these two languages that dilutes the integrity of both. Since “the body itself ‘speaks’”, we must cultivate our ability to both exercise this language truthfully, and to read this language according to the truth (104:3).

As Adam and Eve had a pure vision of the meaning of the body according to the Truth, we must approach others with an openness to understanding the fullness of their subjectivity. According to John Paul II, “’Meaning’ is born in consciousness *with the rereading of the* (ontological) *truth of the object*. Through this rereading, the (ontological) truth enters, so to speak, into the cognitive, that is, subjective and psychological dimension” (119:1). Therefore, the degree to which we approach a person according to their truth as a subject concretely affects the

way in which we understand them. The way we understand the meaning of another person has major implications considering that, according to Blumer, "Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things" (1969, p. 2). Approaching another with an openness to their subjectivity cultivates a proper understanding of another, as well as an environment in which the other can feel safe to unveil the full truth of themselves, knowing that they will be seen for the fullness of their subject and not as an object to be used.

John Paul II says that we help each other remain within the union through “affective manifestations” (132:5), language of the body that speaks to the truth of the body and expresses the communion of persons. In other words, confirming the truth of oneself and others as inherently valuable through actions such as signs of tenderness, which visibly confirms unity within the relationship. These manifestations confirm the fullness of another, which cultivates the peace of the interior gaze that can draw the relationship into a greater depth of intimacy, and posit the exchange as a safe place for vulnerability.

Original Shame: The Injury to Absolute Communication

"The meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process.”

After the instance of first sin, the words of Adam to God’s call for him marks a radical departure in his understanding of the meaning of himself and his body that previously marked the original experiences of man. “I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid” (*Gen* 3:10). Where man and woman were once naked without shame, they are now ashamed of their nakedness and cover themselves. This shows that something has changed in the way in which man and woman interpreted the symbols of their own body and the other’s body, as well as a change in how they felt about the exposure of themselves. In the state of original nakedness, man expresses himself

as a person according to his own specific structure. However, man begins limiting that expression through hiding, which shows a distinct lack of trust and a recoiling from the full revelation of oneself out of fear. John Paul II says that this experience marks the entrance of shame into humanity.

> In the experience of shame, the human being experiences fear with regard to his second self, (for example, woman before man). This is substantially fear for one's own 'self.' With shame, the human being manifests almost instinctively the need of affirmation and acceptance of this 'self,' according to its rightful value. He experiences it at the same time both within himself, and externally, before the 'other.' (12:1)

In this passage, John Paul II sheds light on how, after the Fall, the invisible meaning that was once inherent in the experience of the body of both the self and other has been estranged from its quality of being self-evident. Where Adam and Eve once shared an absolute interpretation of meaning, their shame now impels them to interpret their experience of being through a lens of fear for themselves. This loss of absolute meaning changes the way in which man interprets his own self and the other, ultimately injuring the very place of relationship in which the fullness of their personhood was created to be revealed.

A Loss of Absolute Shared Meaning

Upon the entrance of shame, Adam and Eve no longer share the experience of meaning. "Reciprocal communion in humanity itself through the body… is overturned at this moment" (29:2) as the integrity of this communion is now called into doubt in the consciousness of the man and woman. The reason they are afraid of exposing their nakedness is that they can now be misinterpreted, looked upon in a way that is not in accord with their rightful value. Due to the

divisiveness of sin, they no longer share the Creator's absolute vision of reality. John Paul II says that the entrance of shame "indicates the state of the human spirit distanced from the original simplicity and from the fullness of values that man and the world possess 'in the dimensions of God'" (28:5). This means, that while the values and meaning of man and the world according to God has not changed, within the vision of Adam and Eve, reality, particularly that of their own embodied self, has become alienated from this inherent meaning. Looking at the symbols of one another, Adam and Eve now engage in an interpretive process, or an inner dialogue, that is not in harmony with absolute Truth.

Understanding of the Self Obscured.

The entrance of shame is marked by a transformation in the meaning of John Paul II's use of the term the "second self." Where the second self once explicitly referred to the other subject of the relationship, Adam **to** Eve, and Eve **to** Adam, the second self now refers to the *self in front of the other*, Adam **before** Eve and Eve **before** Adam. Hence, John Paul II's use of the term no longer refers to the second self as a place of unity upon being with another, but of the place where man now experiences shame in front of another, which he defines as "fear with regard to his second self" (12:1). Therefore, man covers himself. Where he was once free because he was naked, Adam now says he is afraid because he is naked. This shows the entrance of a new type of interpretation, one that is alienated from direct experience, and marks a departure from the simplicity of the original experience of mutually understood communication.

John Paul II's statement that man now experiences "at the same time both within himself, and externally, before the 'other'" (12:1) speaks of a lack of unity in the "I" and the "me" referred to earlier by Mead. Man within himself is the "I", while man experiencing himself

externally before the other is the “me.” As the grammar implies, the “I” is the subject itself. It is the self that does the being and doing. The “me” is viewed as an object. Since one stands outside of oneself to observe the “me,” the “me” is removed from one’s immediate subjectivity. The “I” is experienced and observes, while the “me” is observed. After the Fall, man now experiences a tension that makes unity hard to achieve due to a lack of a perfect sharing of meaning and interpretation. Where Adam once knew himself as a subject, “I”, through the looking glass of Eve within their communion through role entering, Adam now peers into the looking glass of Eve, now fractured through their lack of shared interpretation, through role taking. His view of himself is now his assumption of the other’s interpretation. The “me” is viewed as an object, compromising his full understanding of his own subjectivity.

Understanding of the Other Obscured.

This experience of the self as object does not remain without effect. According to John Paul II, this objectification of self demonstrates the “difficulty in identifying oneself with one’s own body, not only in the sphere of one’s own body, but even more so in regard to the subjectivity of the other human being, of woman for man and man for woman” (29:4). Before the Fall, John Paul II referred to Adam and Eve’s expression and consciousness of the full richness of the other person as a subject. Adam and Eve were the “reciprocal interpenetration of the ‘I’ of the human persons” which excluded any “reduction to an object” (19:1). After the Fall, Adam and Eve no longer approach the realities of themselves and the other in the fullness of their personal subjectivity, and so objectification of the other becomes a reality (32:5). In fact, it is not until after the Fall that Adam names the woman “Eve,” imposing his meaning upon her rather than inviting her to express the meaning of herself. Where joy in Eve once dominated Adam’s

language, there is a shift. “From the moment in which the man ‘*dominates*’ her, *the communion of persons*-which consists in the spiritual unity of the two subjects who gave themselves to each other-*is replaced by a different mutual relationship,* namely, by a relationship *of possession* of the other as an object of one’s own desire” (31:3). John Paul II also calls this departure from the relationship of gift “a relationship of appropriation” (32:6), as the beauty of all the body expresses is appropriated from the fullness of its meaning. In this way, to the very core of their understanding of themselves, Adam and Eve’s experience of consubstantiality is wounded. “Instead of being ‘together with the other’ – a subject in unity, or better, in the sacramental ‘unity of the body’--- man becomes an object for man, the female for the male and vice versa” (32:4).

Place of Relationship Injured through Opposition

Finally, the relationship becomes centered on the self, and hence departing from the law of self-gift by which man can understand himself. The fact that the experience of shame is expressed through a shame of the nakedness of the body, the place of sexuality, reflects that all that once expressed unity and gift is now interpreted as difference, creating mutual opposition. It is the relationship that is hurt, ending the power of whole reciprocal communion. This has great repercussions because it is in relationships and through interactions that one understands him or herself. Man “cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self” and concupiscence, man’s departure from the full reality of God, “attacks precisely this 'sincere gift': it deprives man, one could say, of the dignity of the gift, which is expressed by his body through femininity and masculinity, and in some sense 'depersonalizes' man” (32:4). The loss of communion and

acknowledgement of subjectivity in relationship threatens the very place, the relationship, in which personhood is best expressed.

Redeeming the Place of Shame

According to Mead (1934), when an individual no longer experiences unity within a group in which they belong, it is natural for feelings of opposition to arise as a means of self-protection. “In those social situations in which he cannot, for the time being, integrate his social relations with other individual selves into a common, unitary pattern, there ensues, temporarily, an attitude of hostility, of ‘latent opposition,’ on his part toward the organized society or social community of which he is a member; and during that time the given individual self must ‘call in’ or rely upon the feeling of superiority toward that society or social community, or toward its other individual members, in order to buoy himself up and ‘keep himself going’ as such” (p. 307).

The “latent opposition” in which Mead speaks recalls the interior opposition that John Paul II says that Adam and Eve take on between the spiritual and sensible, and between understanding their human similarity even within their sexual differences (13:1). Mead says that in experiencing this opposition between unity and division between the self and other, “it is quite necessary that if we are to keep ourselves going we should thus present ourselves to ourselves” (p. 307), recalling reliance of the “me” to form a sense of identity. The measure of our sense of self does not become inherent to our subject, but relative to the metric of the other, requiring a sense of superiority. Essentially, as people, we possess a capacity to compare ourselves to others that, while it has a function of bringing us into socialization when this capacity is focused on behavior, can become a means by which we experience ourselves and others that is essentially

divisive. Comparison relies on the "me" observation, internalizing and externalizing a sense of objectification that must be fought in order to maintain a true vision of ourselves and others as unique subjects with an inherent value. Our value cannot be measured relative to any metric provided by social society but only by the "image of God" by which man was created. Walking the line between a sense of self-belonging without shame, and yet rejecting a sense of superiority that can give us an illusionary feeling of such belonging at the expense of an objectification of ourselves and others through comparison, is no easy task. This line requires a deep recourse to an absolute meaning of ourselves that must be revealed by our capacity to live according to the image of our Creator. Where comparison and objectification can exacerbate the experience of shame, we must look at unity and relationship as a place in which shame can approach healing.

Recent research has been putting more emphasis on exploring the phenomenon of shame as a source of much of the deepest human discomfort, and as a result of the wounding of personal belonging (Brown, 2006). Shame transformed the peace of the original nakedness of Adam and Eve into a place of hurt, causing them to hide themselves for fear. Shame led the couple to retreat more deeply form each other, paradoxically retreating from the relationship in which shame could be redeemed. The fear inspired by their shame manifested in a retraction of vulnerability and self-expression for self-protection. In our own communicative behavior, an embracement of vulnerability within a relationship may be an important first step in giving ourselves a platform in which to grow in self-understanding that is in accordance with reality. However, vulnerability does open us up to the possibility of hurt. Our essential need for others in order to grow in self-understanding is already a very vulnerable thing considering that no person in which we can enter into relationship with, despite their striving, possesses the perfect vision of the Creator. Since relationship is not one-sided, the pursuit to communicate according to the

fullness of our person is best pursued alongside another. There must be a mutual understanding that the fallen nature of each other cannot be perfectly overcome, but with a trust in the worthiness of the pursuit despite this fact and as a recourse to grace. According to John Paul II, through the participation of the historical Christ in the reality of the world, while man is closed from God by his lack of original innocence because of sin, he is at the same time opened "to the mystery of redemption, which was accomplished in Christ and through Christ" (4:9).

Conclusion

Walking through the original experiences of the first man and woman gives us unique insight into the inherent symbolic meaning of our bodies, and into the places in which redemption is necessary for the fullness of communication, of communion, to be realized. John Paul II considers the mutual consciousness of the human body as a manifestation of a person as a full gift, and a resolution to respond in an equally personal way to be the source of interpersonal communication. John Paul II says, "Interpersonal communication penetrates deeply into the system of communion (communio personarum), and at the same time it grows from it and develops correctly within it" (96:3). Since proper communication both propels us towards communion, and is cultivated within communion, pursuing the experience of both communication and communion lends to the strengthening of the other. *Theology of the Body* understands the meaning of the person as that of a gift, therefore, to participate in shared meaning according to this reality an individual must participate in the sharing of persons that is characteristic of a gift, in communion. In communion, we seek to share the fullness of meaning; we offer the fullness of ourselves in self-gift, and recognize another as a gift through opening

ourselves to receive their fullness. We express this process through the language of our body and through verbal language, which must be integrated with embodied reality to be meaningful.

Because of the great value of the body in the system of interpersonal communion as symbol of the person, John Paul II speaks of the ethical responsibility of society, through art, media, and the like, to preserve the integrity of this symbol. As Blumer (1969) attests, a symbol is "a stimulus that has a learned meaning and value for people" (p. 57). Therefore, man's capacity for symbolic naming must exercise caution to ensure that the meaning and value of the body is not imposed upon it in a demeaning way, but rather revealed by the body itself for the correct formation of society's understanding and interpretation. Therefore, John Paul II speaks of the importance of environments that cultivate a pure vision of the person that is in line with the reality of the human person by preserving the "element of the gift" (96:3) that is inherent to the body. While the task of proper communication is in part personal, it takes place in a society that forms our symbolic understanding, necessitating the consideration of our environment's influence upon this endeavor.

Through contemplating the symbolic nature of the body as an "image of God," we come to understand the body as not simply a biological fact, but as a theological icon designed by God to reveal something about Himself. "In the 'language of the body,' man and woman carry on the dialogue that began on the day of creation" (123:4), John Paul II says. In this way, the language of the body always speaks of not only the mysterious depth of each person, but to the inexhaustible mystery of creation itself as it flows from the mystery of its Creator. Human interaction speaks not only of the people involved, but of their incomprehensible origin, an origin in which humanity is destined to return. Because of this element of mystery, and the state of humanity caused by the Fall, a full understanding of ourselves and our symbolic nature may not

be realized until the direct revelation of God at the ultimate redemption of the body. It is at this time that individuals will experience the ultimate communion of creation in God. However, this consideration does not devalue the pursuit of unifying communication, but rather bestows through communication the possibility for us to experience in our present lives a taste of the ultimate communion that is to come. In 1939, before John Paul II became pope, he wrote a poem entitled “Development of Language” which expresses our struggle for meaning and the ultimate role of Christ in restoring all meaning into right order. The end of the poem illustrates the ultimate importance of God’s role in restoring communion.

> You who walk behind the heart,
> you who uncover the roots of our growth,
> you alone have brought union
> to the multiplicity of words. (Paul, 1994, p. 133)

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